DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 933 SO 014 549

AUTHOR Cleveland, Harlan
TITLE U.S. Foreign Policy: Illusions of Powerlessness and Realities of Power.
PUB DATE 27 Jul 81
NOTE 21p.; May be marginally legible due to bleeding through of print type.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making; *Developing Nations; *Foreign Policy; Global Approach; *Modernization; Nuclear Warfare; Peace; *Policy Formation; *Political Power; War; *World Affairs; World Problems

ABSTRACT

The foreign policy of the United States has not taken into consideration the dynamics of world politics and the kinds of power required to participate in it. Foreign policy makers need a post-Kissinger, post-Brzezinski doctrine that corrects the distorted focus on U.S.-Soviet relations as on our central problem, accepts the inherent linkage between arms control and other world policies, recognizes that modernization in developing nations is the engine of international insecurity, and ceases to divide U.S. policy into domestic and foreign questions. The concept of national security as military defense must be enlarged to encompass oil, global environmental risks, population growth, refugees, terrorists, global inflation, and the implications of mutual assured destruction. Similarly, the centerpiece of world order politics is the management of modernization in third world countries and the awareness that social upheavals bring about disintegration of governance. Also, the distinction between domestic and foreign policy is obsolete; so-called domestic decisions about agricultural subsidies, unemployment, energy conservation, and other matters are enormously important to every nation. The leadership needed to effect a foreign policy change requires the capacity to educate whole populations. (Author/KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED225933

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Harlan Cleveland

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY:
ILLUSIONS OF POWERLESSNESS AND REALITIES OF POWER

by

Harlan Cleveland

sp 014 574

POLITIQUE INTERNATIONALE
Revised Draft: July 27, 1981

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY:
ILLUSIONS OF POWERLESSNESS AND REALITIES OF POWER

Harlan Cleveland

I

In every U.S. Administration I can remember, foreign and defense policies have been a prominent, and often as not a predominant, theme. The great initiatives of the late 1940s -- the United Nations, Bretton Woods, the Atlantic Alliance, the Marshall Plan, Point Four -- were the initial challenges confronted by the now fondly remembered Truman years. Under President Eisenhower, before the hot Korean War had cooled down and before the ink of his eloquent "Chance for Peace" speech had dried, the cold war began to heat up. Gary Francis Powers, his U-2, and the Bay of Pigs were the Eisenhower leftovers which President Kennedy had to chew, and choke on, during his thousand days. In addition, Kennedy had his missile crisis and his unfulfilled "Alliance for Progress" with Latin America. Lyndon Johnson, our "domestic" President, saw his presidency swallowed up in the "foreign policy" debacle of Vietnam. Conversely, our "foreign policy" President, Richard Nixon, who opened the door to Peking and deepened détente with Moscow, was destroyed by "domestic" arrogance.

The 30-month hiatus between Nixon and Carter -- the Ford Administration -- saw the final chapter of the Vietnam experience and the bravado of Mayaguez. Jimmy Carter's Administration had self-induced trouble with its on-again, off-again human rights initiatives, its Panama Canal Treaty, its SALT negotiations, and its NATO allies. Even the achievement at Camp David brought new agonies created in the Middle East by that success.

Foreign policy had something close to star billing in the electoral referendum of 1980. In the end the Carter Presidency, which never did think through and project a coherent strategy, succumbed to the debilitating virus of the protracted hostage crisis. And in an ironic epilogue, the Americans held in Teheran were released to Jimmy Carter's successor, President Ronald Reagan.

The first months of the Reagan Administration have not been an aberration from this historical trend. Foreign policy had something close to star billing in the electoral drama of 1980. The Reagan Administration came onto a stage already overcrowded with issues unsolved and questions unaddressed: the mutual mismanagement of the U.S. Soviet balance, the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, the uncertain future of strategic arms control; the global inflation, the strains inside OPEC, two big energy suppliers hacking away at each other's oil facilities in the Persian Gulf, the running sore of Arab-Israeli relations; the strength of the disturbingly competitive Japanese, the unexpected policy initiatives of our European allies, the unstoppable flood of illegal immigrants.

Reagan's political strategy was clear, if simple: to focus the nation's attention on reducing the cost of government and following through on the promise of a three-year tax cut. But the complexities of international politics would not wait in the wings; they quickly elbowed their way onto center stage. The posturing in Washington was mostly about Soviet behavior; the new Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, faithfully repeated the central error of the Kissinger and Brzezinski eras by looking out at the world through the prism of U.S.-Soviet relations. But the troublesome issues continued, as before, to bubble up from the

triad of revolutions in the Third World -- the revolutions of modernization, of fairness, and of cultural identity.

The initiative on foreign policy has passed, at least for the time being, from the center to the periphery: Washington, Tokyo and Europe's capitals now have to react to trouble that starts with power struggles in the developing regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America. No matter how urgent our "domestic" economic management continues to be, foreign policy will be a daily preoccupation in the White House of the 1980s.

II

As I get around the United States, I find my fellow-Americans not so much overwhelmed by the international problems we face, as underwhelmed by the leaders who are urging us to face them. As to U.S. leadership style, James Reston described what bothers us. He penned the sentence long ago, in explaining what bothered him about John Foster Dulles. Secretary Dulles, he wrote, doesn't fall into traps; he digs large holes in his own path, then jumps into them.

But I think we the American people are also peering, these days, into a large, self-dug hole. It's a sudden sense of impotence, a feeling that the United States of America has quite suddenly become -- as the Chinese put it -- Big Noise on Stairs Nobody Coming Down.

We are obviously not impotent. We are still the world's most relevant society -- more involved in more aspects of more people's destinies than any other nation. We are also, to our continuing surprise, still the world's most attractive society: a heavily disproportionate number of the world's refugees (who now number 16 million, which is one million more than all the refugees and displaced persons in the world after the

Second World War) want to come to the United States, by hook if possible and by crook if necessary.

But if we are going to cope with the responsibilities this magnetic attraction places on us, and if our leaders of record are not coping and unlikely to cope, then we the people are going to have to lead our leaders out of the wilderness.

The American people have had quite a lot of practice, in the past couple of decades, getting out ahead of their leaders. The Federal Government was the last to learn that the war in Vietnam was over. President Nixon and his staff were the last to realize that Nixon was through. The tidal movements of social change in the past twenty years -- environmental sensitivity, civil rights for all races, the enhanced status of women, recognition of the rights of consumers and small investors -- were not generated by established leaders, but boiled up from the people at large.

During the unpleasantness of the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant accident in 1979, a reporter asked someone why a technician couldn't fix a stuck valve in the radioactive plant. The reply he recorded was a classic: "In theory he can, but in practice he can't." I've been pondering that reply ever since, and have concluded that the trouble with American foreign policy is just the other way around: In practice we can, but in theory we can't.

I think it's fair to say that the established leadership of this country has run out of general theory, on several policy frontiers at once. We don't yet have a post-Keynesian economics which explains and deals with inflation and recession glued together at one end of a business cycle that may not even be cyclical. We don't yet have a post-New Deal social policy that gets beyond solving problems by creating new

categorical subsidies and authorizing larger appropriations. And we don't yet have a post-Kissinger, post-Brzezinski doctrine that corrects for the distortion of the U.S.-Soviet prism, accepts the inherent linkage between arms control and the rest of world policies, recognizes the modernization process in the developing world as the primary engine of international insecurity, and knows you can't any longer divide U.S. policy into "domestic" and "foreign" questions.

III

We have certainly been learning, the hard way, what we cannot do with traditional forms of power — that there are terrorist threats for which there are no military counterthreats, energy problems for which there are no military remedies, environmental risks for which there is no military insurance, even military measures to which military power can only be part of the response.

The annual debates on defense budgets still tend to obscure, for parliaments and publics in the industrial democracies, the growing content of non-military factors in national security policy. The fresh theory we are searching for will certainly have to move well beyond concepts of national security as military defense based on complex systems, to encompass oil, global environmental risks, population growth, refugees, terrorists, unsafe streets, Islamic revolutions, and a global epidemic called inflation.

Henry Kissinger now says with refreshing candor that we are still living on inherited intellectual capital -- assumptions about defense strategy carried over from the 1950s, about arms control from the early 1960s.

I would go further. Too much of our foreign policy creaks along on a chassis that dates from the late 1940s. That was when the builders of the postwar world thought of international politics not as a dynamic flow system but as "architecture." Their concept of peace was not a process but a "structure." No wonder the winds of change have broken its windows and blown off its roof.

Those who were (as Dean Acheson said of himself) "present at the creation" made some assumptions that seemed sensible at the time. But their assumptions could not be expected to have a half-life of more than a short generation.

They assumed, for a start, that the big powers would manage the world. That was the basis for the League of Nations Covenant; it was carried over into the United Nations Charter. But the problem turned out to be the management of pluralism in a world where nobody is in charge. Besides, the big powers didn't really want to manage the world. The American people certainly didn't want to be in charge. Others, we thought, should take their own responsibilities and mould their own destinies. A discomfiting posture, as things turned out: we got the Europeans, the Japanese and much of the Third World off our backs, and soon found quite a few of them treading on our tail.

The postwar architects assumed that nuclear weapons would be usable. But the postwar decades have been crammed with instances of the nuclear powers' inability to think of any way to use even kilotons, let alone megatons, of explosive power in real-life situations -- in Korea, in the Middle East, in Southern Africa, in Southeast Asia, not to mention Lebanon and Northern Ireland and El Salvador.

We ourselves spent ten embarrassing years in Vietnam not using our supposedly most powerful weapons. They are not even very useful for brandishing any more. The last good brandish was when Nikita Khrushchev threatened to "incinerate the orange groves of Italy and reduce the Acropolis in Athens to radioactive ash." The effect was to galvanize Italy and Greece as loyal members of NATO -- which, given their internal politics, was quite an accomplishment.

What the big potential bang does seem to accomplish is mutual deterrence, a new-style balance of power based on the absence of precedent for nuclear war-fighting. The U.S.-Soviet relationship is in consequence the most stable element in world politics. The Soviets don't know what we would do if. Their uncertainty is soundly rooted in our own: we don't have the slightest idea what we would do if, either. Our uncertainty is therefore credible, and that's the deterrent.

We know that nuclear deterrence works in limiting the intensity of rivalry between two superpowers. We suspect that it would also be effective in sobering up two smaller powers (India and Pakistan? Egypt and Israel?) which achieved the capacity for mutual assured destruction. What we don't know is how nuclear deterrence will work as a multilateral system. And if we define nuclear weapons capacity the way Thomas Schelling has suggested -- as a "mobilization capacity" by which a government has access to the necessary scientists and equipment and nuclear fuel and knows just how many weeks or months it would need to complete a deliverable weapon -- the spread of nuclear energy for power guarantees the spread of nuclear energy for politics.

Each government, or nongovernment, still faces the puzzle of how to use so large an explosion in a manner which is proof against boomerang effects. It is this unsolved puzzle which has probably been the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

main reason for the surprisingly sluggish rate of proliferation so far. But the uncertainties will assuredly multiply, and the balance of uncertainties may not long prove so benign as it has been for a third of a century past.

Meanwhile nuclear weapons are still too powerful to use, except in such extreme circumstances that all other assumptions are exploded too. Yet instead of trying to codify their unusability, the Soviets -- and during the last two years also the United States -- have been wracking their brains to think of ways to make nuclear war-fighting practical, even desirable. If by our actions, our presidential directives and our defense budgets, we both persist in testifying to the supreme value of nuclear weaponry, we will certainly not persuade smaller powers that nuclear weapons technology is not worth what it costs.

Moreover, as long as our war gamers are using (in theory) weapons that are not usable (in practice), we will fail to develop the flexible conventional forces we may really need in very practical real-life emergencies. Parliaments and publics in the industrial democracies are protected from facing defense reality by the nuclear illusions of their political rhetoricians and defense experts. They can pretend that they are defending their constituents' vital interests without spending the kind of defense money that might, to select an example at random, be relevant to maintaining the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf.

IV

Those "present at the creation" made many other assumptions. Energy would be cheap -- but it isn't. The dollar would be an international currency -- but we can now see the need for an international means of

exchange and measure of value that doesn't depend on the vagaries of one nation's economic management. Free trade, they assumed, would be fair -- and so it was for the strong, the early arrivals. But competition, first from our peers and then from newly industrializing countries, made "fair trade" converts of us all. Now everyone seems to agree that international markets are going to be rigged; the remaining questions have to do with who will do the rigging, and for whose benefit.

The founding fathers of the U.N. and NATO thought that the main building block of world order would be cooperation among geographically regional states. But the most dynamic regionalisms turned out to be functional: outside the European Community, OPEC is the world's most important "region." And OECD has grown in relevance because the club of Atlantic industrial democracies by-passed geography and reached out to include Japan, Australia and New Zealand. In political and security matters also, the NATO powers will have to get over their reluctance to consult on threats outside the NATO perimeter. As a military command, NATO has to stay within Treaty bounds. But its main components should be ready very quickly to form "coalitions of the willing" with regional nations to project power as required in other parts of the world.

V

The early architects' most enduring error was to see the rest of the world -- the part that came to be called Third -- as a dependent variable of Atlantic and East-West politics. This is what the three U.S. Administrations of the Seventies were so agonizingly slow to learn: it's the animation and agitation, the turbulence and terror, the rising expectations and rising

resentments of developing countries that are driving our older, seemingly more stable relationships, the U.S.-Soviet standoff and our Atlantic and Pacific alliances.

The greatest dissension within our alliances has to do with issues external to allied defense perimeters -- the politics of Mideast oil, the P.L.O., and the question of imposing sanctions for hostage-snatching and country-snatching. As for the Soviets, we don't seem to tangle with them in Berlin or even the Mediterranean these days; we run across them in the politics of Angola and Ethiopia and Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean -- and in Afghanistan.

Certainly the naked Soviet aggression in Afghanistan helped us understand that given the nature of the Soviet regime, détente could only be what I called it long ago: "The continuation of tension by other means." But we will have to learn to look on Third World countries not as incidental players on a U.S.-Soviet stage. In the Eighties, in their own right, they will likely be the most dynamic and turbulent force in world politics.

Yet for more than a dozen years we have devalued development, assigned a low priority to relations with the Third World, scratched our Presidential and Congressional heads each year about whether two-thirds of the world deserves our cooperation. The Nixon and early Carter "doctrines" were close first cousins: They both called for withdrawal from support to developing-country friends in the arc that reached from South Korea through Southeast Asia around to Israel. They both focussed on big-power geopolitics without realizing that dynamic change in the rest of the world was equally important -- and might even set the big powers at each other's throats.

President Carter was eloquent, during the electoral campaign of 1976, in advocating more attention to poverty and hunger and cultural identity in the developing world, and expanded world trade and aid to enable them to pass without violence through what was obviously going to be a rough transition to modern life. In four years the Carter Administration and the Congress never got around to tackling the dilemmas of development, never got around to reviving the still moribund dialogue with the world's "South." Now it turns out that "world order politics" is the key to the security of the United States of America. But the Reagan Administration is still matching its predecessor in its capacity to neglect the dynamics of development and the politics of modernization.

VI

The centerpiece of "world order politics" is the management of modernization. And that requires us to think much harder about the triple collision which the modernization process has brought about in a hundred countries on three continents. The accident seems always to occur at that dangerous intersection where full-speed modernization collides with claims that modernity enriches the few and deprives the many of its benefits, and collides at the same time with the tenacious resistance of cultural patriots and religious reactionaries.

We watched these two powerful resentments converge on our television screens -- the mullahs in their long robes and the left-wing students in pseudo-Western dress, unlikely pairs married by convenience, shouting not quite in unison for tradition and fairness, pouring into

the streets of Teheran to set fire to tanks and automobiles, those quintessential symbols of modernization. A second collision is bound to follow, and we have seen it in Iran this year as the partisans of fairness and the defenders of tradition find little common ground when the common enemy is removed.

It is not that rapid modernization cannot be reconciled with fairness and tradition. In a few developing countries -- South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Israel -- full speed modernization has been spread quite fairly through whole populations, and rapid economic growth has been somehow reconciled with the dominant local culture. That this would be possible had already been demonstrated by Japan, which raced into the post-industrial era while remaining strikingly Japanese.

We have a long way to go in working with (not just "aiding") our friends in Asia, Africa and Latin America to avert the triple collision of modernization. The first step is to widen our focus to include it in our concept of "national security" -- and not to think of it as something we can turn to some other time, after we have confronted the Soviets and shored up our allies. Indeed, part of East-West and Alliance strategies for the 1980s will be to find workable relationships with the peoples whose dynamism and turbulence are drawing us into confrontation with the Soviet Union and driving wedges between the United States and its Allies.

The most frightening nightmare of the 1980s may not be the familiar mushroom cloud but the disintegration of governance in more and more developing nations -- the product of social upheavals about future fairness and the sturdy defense of past traditions. For it is the explosive

mix of these two movements with the culture of modernization that already pockmark the globe with the degenerative political disease so evident in the Lebanons, Cambodias, El Salvadors, Irans, Turkeys, Italys and who knows how many future examples of the incapacity of national governments to cope.

VII

Our sense of powerlessness is not, for the most part, a judgment on our economic or military potential. It is the consequence of not yet having got our heads on straight about the changed dynamics of world politics and the kinds of power required to participate in it.

Our leaders, under whatever party label, will keep digging those inviting holes in their own path if they persist in using old theory to deal with new problems. The central problem is not a question of "management." The effective management of diplomacy is not so arcane an art that it cannot be effectively mastered through on-the-job training. Harry Truman taught us that. The priceless ingredient of diplomacy is an understandable general strategy -- a clear-headed sense of where we as a nation are trying to go, what we are trying to do, what kind of world order we really want to build. Ad hockery is not good enough for the world's leading power.

In Henry Kissinger's time we knew what the strategy was, like it or not. The trouble was that it focussed on the Moscow-Peking-Washington triangle, dealt too casually with the economic issues our European and Japanese allies were most interested in, and (until, fleetingly, the last 18 months of the Ford Administration) hardly at all with the issues of fairness and instability in the developing world.

Democratic Administrations are often faulted for having too many theorists and not enough practical types. Yet even the potential theorists in the Carter Administration were not visibly working on strategy, and the large pool of talent outside the government was not mobilized to fill the gap. It is not the first time in the history of American government that the urgent has been the enemy of the important. But the Gresham's Law by which fire-fighting leaves no room for thinking is a more and more seriously debilitating malady as the policy issues to be tackled become more and more interconnected, interdisciplinary, interdepartmental, and international.

Indeed, at the White House level, there is no such thing as a policy issue which is not partly international.

What we mostly want from other countries -- and what they mostly want from us -- is changes in "domestic" preconceptions, priorities, policies, and practices. By the same token, most of the so-called 'domestic policy" actions we take -- decisions about the level of agricultural subsidies, the direction of research and development, the rescue of uncompetitive companies, the degree of emphasis on energy conservation, the supply of U.S. dollars, the amount of unemployment we will stand for, the size and shape of our budget deficit, and many, many others -- are enormously important to nearly every other nation on earth. Yet the U.S. Government is unambigously divided between "domestic" and "foreign" affairs. To paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan, every matter of public policy is born a little "domestic policy" or a little "foreign policy" -- and is so treated as it grows up through the processes of decision, both in the Executive Branch and on Capitol Hill.

One of the most elementary doctrines about the management of large-scale systems is that a supervisory office should not be organized in the same way as its subordinate offices are -- that, indeed, it should be deliberately organized to cut across the vertical divisions below, in order to throw new light on their interrelationships and inconsistencies before issues come to the top executive for "decision" (which can mean resolution of differences or confirmation of a consensus already reached among subordinates). Each of the Cabinet Departments was established essentially to deal either with national security/foreign policy matters, or with "domestic" policy. Yet the White House has for three decades been organized the same way, coordinating State and Defense and the Intelligence community through a National Security Council (NSC), and channeling the rest of the government through a "Domestic Policy Staff," the lineal successor of a function performed by staff officers under a variety of titles ever since the Truman Administration.

Since the system does not fit the function, dissonance between foreign and domestic policies is normal. Review the history of energy policy, the law of the sea, the sale of arms, the issue of selling grains to the Soviet Union, and the export of nuclear fuels, and you will find plenty of examples of international ramifications unpredicted, ignored, or suppressed.

One example is enough. North America is the centerpiece of a world food system which is not yet delivering enough food to keep large numbers of people from malnutrition. Yet most Federal farm legislation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, still tilt toward restricting food production. The idea is to maximize the return to the producers, and there is nothing wrong with that. But the

U.S. Government has hardly even started to change the system so that producing to meet world needs (not merely the "effective demand" of the affluent hungry, such as the Russians) is made profitable for the American farmer.

Despite the melding of "domestic" and "international" issues out there in the real world, it is still almost literally true that only one person in the Executive Branch is hired to work on both domestic and foreign policy. His title is President of the United States. And no one occupying that office has organized the White House staff as though foreign and domestic policy were more than distant cousins, let alone Siamese twins.

VIII

The other missing element is the leadership to mobilize our whole population in the service of shared and compelling purposes.

The imperatives of interdependence transcend the narrow responsibilities of the federal departments, of the White House, and of Congress. They imply changes of purpose and priorities in education, in research and development, in business statemanship, in the orientation of trade unions, in the communications media with their global impact, and in voluntary agencies with their grass-roots base.

The necessity to make so many public policy decisions in international ways, in consultation or agreement with other nations and international enterprises, and the fact that the "interdependence issues" in "world order politics" reach deeply into the "domestic" politics of our own and other nations, require a special kind of leadership. In the easier days of the Marshall Plan, the decisive actions

needed to meet an international crisis were essentially taken by a few legislative and executive leaders -- and the remainder of Americans participated in passive ways by reading the newspapers, paying their taxes, and reelecting Harry Truman. But the chronic crisis of interdependence, of which the troubles called energy and food and arms and inflation and jobs and money are only the most obvious examples, requires action by dozens of government agencies, hundreds of state and local governments, thousands of business executives, hundreds of thousands of teachers, and millions of householders, automobile owners, investors, and organized and unorganized workers.

The style of national governance appropriate to these circumstances is more akin to wartime leadership, engaging the cooperation of whole populations to take "domestic" actions without which the requisite international cooperation cannot be arranged by even the most skillful diplomats. Such leadership goes far beyond the capacity to guide legislation through the labyrinth of enactment, to the capacity to educate whole populations. Except on energy policy, the task of mobilizing the United States of America to cope with interdependence has not been seriously tackled. For modern interdependence and national security require changes in attitudes and assumptions, life styles and workways -- the capacity to elicit millions of willing actions, more or less voluntary, backed up by self-interest, market economics, social pressure and only at the margin by governmental intervention.

IX

Though our leaders often fog rather than illuminate the crucial issues, it is well to remember that there is a constant beacon. The

good news is that the American people, not their leaders, make the basic foreign-policy decisions and set the basic long-term goals for the kind of world we want to live in.

Our central purpose is still what President Kennedy captured in a single phrase: "to make the world safe for diversity." A pluralistic world, a world with nobody in charge and all of us partly in charge, a world with room for many cultures, protected in going their self-selected ways -- that won't be a comfortable world, for Americans or anyone else. But for Americans, it should be a recognizable (because Madisonian) world, even a congenial world -- because diversity is where we come from.

That makes our purposes in the world different from the purposes of most other societies, because our experience at home has been different. "When will people learn," Macauley asked, "that it is the spirit we are of, not the machinery we employ, that binds us to others?"

In this world there are a good many nations, and countless parties and organizations, whose leaders passionately believe some single national state, some unifying political doctrine, some monochromatic race of people, can and should dominate the world. But we Americans know that nations are too interdependent, doctrines too dangerous, ethnic and cultural groups too proud, and individual men and women just too ornery to give these claims and pretensions much of a chance in the long run. We know these things not because we have figured them out rationally, but because that is the kind of people our experience has taught us to be.

Visitors to the United States often find us more than a little confusing -- especially visitors who try to describe their goals and define their "system" with practiced words from ancient manuscripts and modern manifestoes.

We do not, of course, have a "system;" we have a protected plurality of systems. The Englishman Edmund Burke, in his famous speech about how to get along with those wild men across the Atlantic, said in despair that our religion was "the dissidence of dissent." Americans, Burke thought, were "a people who are still, as it were, but in the gristle, and not yet hardened into the bone of manhood."

In the two centuries since those words were spoken we have kept relearning, from hardening, bone-building experience in peace and war, that the best and most durable way to manage our public business is the undogmatic, unsystematic, loose-reined, checked-and-balanced, part-public-and-part-private governance called democracy. We have learned to distrust the idea that any one person's (or any one group's) view of society, is the correct, approved, authorized version. The one essential think about democracy, I suppose, is this: that no individual or group ever gains the exclusive right to say, with authority, what democracy is. That, for most Americans, is also the first principle of world order.